

FOREWORD



EVER since the publication of their first novels, the Brontë sisters, Charlotte, Emily Jane and Anne, have been the subject of increasing interest to students and lovers of English Victorian Literature and psychologists interested in the subject of group genius.

The psychological material provided by the characters of these three women, the bleak and tragedy-shadowed setting of their brief lives, together with the genius of their books, is sufficient cause for this unusual and undying interest. They have been the theme of numerous biographies, essays, sketches and plays. In the words of the late Professor George Saintsbury, "... their family history generally, has been discussed with the curiously disproportionate minuteness characteristic of our time."

However that may be, and, even if there are those critics who hold the opinion "that too much fuss is made about the Brontës," the interest continues, and thousands of visitors yearly make the pilgrimage to Haworth Parsonage, scene of the composition of those remarkable novels and of the days of those three lonely but spirited sisters.

What is the secret of the constant appeal of Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë? The secret lies in the women themselves, in their books and in Haworth on the moors of Yorkshire. Haworth awoke in them the breath of genius, and they used it. They would have created nothing better had they belonged to one of the sophisticated circles of London's intelligentsia. Emily would have done nothing at all. In so far as she "found" herself on the moors and there found, too, room for her outward mystic reach; Emily Brontë was fortunate and happy not dogged by malign fate. Despite the vexations and trials of her daily life, Emily was happy. She was a "solitary" and her happiness is not to be measured by ordinary standards. *Wuthering Heights* could probably never have been written in any other environment. It is the spirit of

the moors matching so exactly, as it happened, Emily's own spirit which gives to **Wuthering Heights** so much more than the commonplace creaking of a hollow melodrama. Perhaps the only other place in the world where she might possibly have written such a book would have been among the bogs and hills of Ireland. The novels of the three sisters were the consequence of a unique combining of spirit and circumstance and environment, especially is this true of Emily Brontë's one rare and strange flower of genius. Charlotte could see nothing in Jane Austen's semi-country, small town, sophistications. She could never have fitted into such a sphere. She belonged to a larger water world. Away from the clean, bare lines of the Yorkshire moors, shut in the narrower confines of a more so, cultivated world, the creative urge and ability of these women would have withered and died. Haworth and the moors were necessary to them.

Charlotte, Emily Jane and Anne received the news that the manuscripts of their respective stories, **Jane Eyre**, **Wuthering Heights**, and **Agnes Grey** had been, at long last accepted for publication. The first was published by Messrs. Smith Elder, while the second and third were offered to an astonished public by J. C. Newby, in 1847. These novels appeared over the names, of Currer Bell, Ellis Bell, and Acton Bell, the intentionally sexless pseudonyms adopted by the authors. The books caused a sensation. **Jane Eyre** became a best seller and the mystery of their authorship did nothing to lessen the sensation.

To mark the centenary of this literary occasion, the following **Notes on the Brontë Family** have been prepared for the guidance of visitors to Haworth Parsonage. In no way do these **Notes** claim to be more than a short outline of the principle known facts about the Brontës of Haworth.

My grateful acknowledgements are due to M. N. H. Turner for reading the proofs and making suggestions.

RICHARD CROOKSHANK.

Calstock, Cornwall

THE BRONTËS

" You know, Miss Brontë, you and I have both written naughty books."

Geraldine Jewsbury, to Miss Charlotte Brontë.

THE Rev. Patrick Brontë, B.A., and his wife, Maria, were the parents of six children: Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte, Emily Jane, Patrick Branwell and Anne; of whom, Charlotte, Emily and Anne were to survive to achieve lasting distinction among English novelists, while Patrick Branwell was to survive long enough to achieve notoriety as the rather troublesome brother of the three celebrated sisters. Those sisters claimed genius for their wayward brother; but Patrick Branwell was to fall by the wayside. Possibly he was the only one to whom the environment of Haworth and the moors were an impediment and not a help. The two other children, Maria and Elizabeth, died in early childhood, at the age of twelve and eleven years.

The Rev. Patrick Brontë, a native of Drumballyroney, County Down, Ireland, was born on St. Patrick's Day, 1777. After a youth and adolescence of some hardship, which he valiantly overcame, he went to St. John's College, Cambridge, where he graduated B.A. in 1806. He subsequently took Holy Orders, being ordained to the title of Wethersfield in Essex, where he commenced his pastoral duties and became engaged to one Mary Burder. The engagement was broken off and Mr. Brontë removed to Yorkshire, holding appointments first at Dewsbury and next at Hartshead. It was while living at Hartshead that he met, wooed and won Miss Maria Branwell, the daughter of Thomas Branwell, merchant in a well-to-do way at Penzance. Patrick and Maria were married

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in 1812, and in 1813 and 1815 there arrived the first fruits of their union : Maria and Elizabeth. In 1815 Mr. Brontë moved once more, this time to Thornton, and the move was soon followed by the arrival of four more children : Charlotte, Emily Jane, Patrick Branwell and Anne. On February 25th, 1820, Mr. Brontë was appointed to the perpetual Curacy of Haworth at a stipend of £250 a year, and there he remained till his death, forty-one years later. Mr. Brontë, like his daughters, had literary leanings. He was the author of several pamphlets and booklets of the edifying, uplifting type ; several tracts and collections of sermons and two romances, one of which bore the alluring title, **The Cottage in the Wood : or The Art of Becoming Rich and Happy**. He also wrote some verse.

Mrs. Brontë, who was born in 1782, died in 1821, not long after the birth of her last child, but a long way from the gently coloured land and sea of her native Cornwall. She died a worn-out exile. With her death there commenced that mournful procession of black Brontë coffins from the Parsonage to the Parish Church, which only ended with the burial of her half-blind husband in 1854. But Mrs. Brontë had found time to write, too. She composed a pamphlet entitled, **The Advantages of Poverty in Religious Concerns**. No doubt it was a case of making an essay of experience. She had come from Penzance to Yorkshire for a holiday ; she met and married Patrick Brontë ; she bore him six children, cared for them as best she could ; wrote a pious tract, and died of cancer of the stomach.

Maria and Elizabeth, the two eldest children, whose thin, diseased figures are only dimly discerned in the corridors of time by the reflected light of the fame of their younger sisters, had both left the Haworth scene for ever by June, 1825, dying within little more than a month of each other. They were both weaklings and suffered from the family complaint of consumption. Maria had always helped her mother with the care of the younger children when they cried or needed something.

The next to go was Patrick Branwell, the only son of the house, who was something of a trial to his not very amiable

father, and a constant source of sorrow, shame and concern to his sisters. But this emotional, susceptible, red-haired boy, who belied the great future fondly imagined for him by his father, had always been the favourite child of his mother. He was born in 1817, and showed an aptitude for learning and writing. He, himself, felt that his chief talent was painting. He wished to become an artist. He left behind him, as proof of his artistic abilities portraits of his sisters, daubed monuments of his gift in this direction. But, like all the rest of the family, he wrote, or could not help writing, yet nothing he composed was published during his lifetime. A large quantity of his manuscripts remain, representing the hours and hours during which he and his sisters covered pages and pages of notebooks with the creatures of their imaginations. Instead of becoming a portrait painter, Patrick Branwell at first became a tutor, then a ticket office clerk in the Leeds and Manchester Railroad Company, from which post he was removed in 1842 for culpable negligence. He next resumed tutoring, but an unhappy passion for his charge's mother led to his dismissal from that post, and so he finally became a desperate and despairing drinker at the Black Bull Inn, Haworth, where he was in great demand as an entertaining conversationalist. To his thirst for drink he added an appetite for opium. He died, standing up (as he had boasted he would) in 1848, at the age of 30, having utterly exhausted the strength of his mind and body and the patience of his father and sisters, except perhaps that of Emily, who seems to have been kinder and more understanding with him than the others. Perhaps a common sense of frustration brought them closer together. Certainly there was something of a sympathetic alliance between these two. And it has long been a storm-centre of literary discussion as to whether or no Patrick Branwell did or did not have a hand in the writing of the opening chapters of **Wuthering Heights**. Much ink has been spilt pro and con. Both sides prove their case to their own satisfaction. The weight of the evidence, however, does seem to favour the view that Branwell did help Emily to a certain extent. But the question must always, for want of more definite evidence, remain an open question unless one is prepared to accept the view of Mr. Malham-Deelaby that the author of **Wuthering Heights** was neither Emily nor Patrick Branwell but Charlotte all the time.

The fourth Brontë child to make the short concluding journey from the Parsonage to the Church was Emily Jane, the stoic, mystical, silent sister, who, dying six days before Christmas, 1848, followed her feckless unsatisfied brother in three months almost to the day. Emily, by some considered the most gifted of the sisters, was the author of several poems and that one outstanding novel, **Wuthering Heights**. A reserved, sensitive, imaginative creature, utterly unhappy when away from her wild, wide moors, she accompanied Charlotte to Brussels to the school of Monsieur Paul Héger, whither these two sisters went to gain experience in teaching with the object of opening a school of their own where pupils would be happy and not hungry, beloved and not bullied. Their own miserable school-days had given them ideas as to what a happy school should be. Plans for this school were discussed and settled; prospectuses were printed and issued. Everything was made ready, and the good offices of such influential people as they knew solicited. But the school never materialised. No pupils were forthcoming. And that was the end of the sisters' first great plan. So, instead of becoming head-mistresses, they became governesses and teachers themselves in other homes and other schools, and continued unhappy in their lives. Emily was homesick at M. Héger's academy for young ladies. She was far from the moors and the separation hurt her. It was the pain of unsatisfied longing for the only place where she could be at all happy and at peace. Though she was too reserved to mix easily with her contemporaries, the pupils at M. Héger's establishment preferred her to Charlotte, whose ceaseless acridulated criticising was rather chilling to budding friendships. Charlotte, who possessed a stern sense of duty and much determination of will, made herself unhappy while at Brussels and destroyed her peace of mind for at least three years by falling in love with the elderly, double-chinned Monsieur Héger; a pathetic, hopeless passion, which was quite unrequited.

Anne Brontë, the youngest of the girls, author of **Agnes Grey** and **The Tenant of Wildfell Hall**, died in 1849, aged 29 years, and was buried at Scarborough, where she had gone into lodgings to recuperate her health. Like her brother and sisters, she had always been delicate, but her life was "calm, quiet, spiritual, and such was her end." The only real excite-

ment in her life was her visit to London with Charlotte on that memorable occasion when they surprised the office of Messrs. Smith Elder with the information that they, these two small, colourless-looking, drably-dressed women were Currer and Acton Bell and that Ellis Bell was their sister Emily. In addition to her two novels, Anne had contributed to the three sisters' joint volume of **Poems**, published in 1846; an issue of 250 copies, of which only two were sold.

The last of the sisters to die was Charlotte, the one who had determined all along that their writings should be published. She died in 1855, after nine months of happy married life with her husband, the Rev. Arthur Bell Nicholls, a Scotsman—though born in Ireland—who first came to Haworth as her father's curate. Mr. Brontë had never very much liked Mr. Nicholls, and growing more and more selfish in his blindness and old age, and still perhaps hoping for a brilliant marriage for his last remaining daughter, he objected very forcibly to his curate's proposition that Charlotte should become his wife. Charlotte, herself, seems to have been a little uncertain as to the appropriateness of her feelings for Mr. Nicholls. She was not at all sure that the ones she entertained were those suitable with which to enter wedlock. They appear to have been a compound of pity, affection and regard. And Charlotte was a highly critical person and had covered many pages of her novel **Shirley** in caricaturing the curates of Haworth, including Arthur Bell Nicholls. But Mr. Nicholls loved the woman and not the renowned novelist; he was a persistent, if somewhat a lachrymose, lover, and he finally, after much difficulty, opposition, strain and anguish, succeeded in persuading Charlotte Brontë to become Mrs. Nicholls and her father to withdraw his objections. This he eventually did, but only after Charlotte, with commendable and characteristic feminine practical commonsense, had pointed out to her father the enormous advantages that would be his in having a son-in-law who was also his curate. Old Patrick Brontë then grudgingly consented to the marriage, but with typical Irish perversity declined to attend the ceremony. After Charlotte's death, Mr. Nicholls remained with his father-in-law in that tomb-encircled Parsonage, now completely empty for him, until the latter's end in 1861. The years softened Mr.

Brontë's prejudice towards his son-in-law curate, and they became on affectionate terms with each other. Mr. Brontë's will revealed that he had bequeathed the larger part of his property to him. Probate made a long-overdue amend.

On the death of the Rev. Patrick Brontë, Mr. Nicholls returned to Ireland, where he took to farming and a second wife. He died in 1906.

Such is the brief outline of the Brontës of Haworth Parsonage; the parents and those extraordinary children who lived on a Spartan diet of boiled potatoes and wrote highly imaginative stories while other children of their own age were playing with toys and dolls. But there were no toys or dolls at Haworth; only the tombstones, the moors and a stern, unconquerable spirit which these children shared in common.

The first publication of the three sisters was their joint volume of **Poems** issued by Messrs. Aylott and Jones in 1846. It was not a success. It appeared over the names of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell, and cost the sisters £46 10s. 0d. to get it published. The book was priced at four shillings, and it was a financial loss to the authors. But its failure turned their minds, with greater determination, to writing prose.

In the volume, **Poems**, Emily's verse is that which possesses the greatest merit, and even if she had not written **Wuthering Heights** it is beyond question that some of her poetry alone would have won her a place among the minor poets of the mid-Victorian period. Anne Brontë's verse shows little distinction; it is on the same level as much other verse which came forth from Vicarages and Rectories during the last century. **Agnes Grey** and **The Tenant of Wildfell Hall** have little to commend them beyond their sincerity, though at the time of their publication there were not lacking those critics who held them to be superior works to those of her sisters. But only the prose works of Charlotte and Emily and some of the latter's verse contain that literary and spiritual worth which will endure for all time.

Charlotte Brontë was the author of four published novels: **Jane Eyre**, **Shirley**, **Villette** and **The Professor**, which last,

though written first for publication, was only published after her death. The first three of her books appeared under the name of Currer Bell till that nom-de-plume was finally abandoned in 1849, when the secret of their authorship had become widely known. In 1860 appeared **Emma**, a prose fragment, in **The Cornhill Magazine**. Charlotte had made her contribution to the unwanted volume of **Poems**, but her poetry commands no more attention than does that of her sister, Anne.

In addition to the published works of the Brontë sisters, there exists a vast quantity of manuscripts, the result of their long literary labours in the sitting-room of Haworth Parsonage. These date from their earliest days, and are witnesses, not only to the precocious ability of three children, but to the energy, perseverance and indomitable courage of three women who, dogged either by illness, tragedy or near poverty, almost the whole length of their days, yet did not give in.

PUBLISHED WRITINGS OF THE BRONTËS

THE REV. PATRICK BRONTË :

Cottage Poems.

The Rural Minstrel (poems).

The Phenomenon (poem).

The Cottage in the Wood: or The Art of Becoming Rich and Happy (a romance).

The Maid of Killarney: or Albion and Flora (a romance).

Miscellaneous Tracts and Sermons.

MRS. MARIA BRONTË :

The Advantages of Poverty in Religious Concerns.

Some of Mrs. Brontë's letters to her husband, written during the period of their engagement, were published in Clement Shorter's **Charlotte Brontë and Her Circle.**

CHARLOTTE BRONTË :

Contributions to **Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell**, 1846.

Jane Eyre, 1847.

Shirley, 1849.

Villette, 1853.

Memoir to Emily in Selection of Ellis Bell's Poems.

Biographical Notes on Ellis and Acton Bell in Preface to the later editions of **Wuthering Heights** and **Agnes Grey.**

The Professor, published posthumously, 1857.

Emma, a prose fragment, published posthumously in **The Cornhill Magazine**, 1860.

The Spell (Oxford University Press).

EMILY JANE BRONTË :

Contributions to **Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell**,
1846.

Wuthering Heights, 1847.

Selected Poems, edited by Charlotte Brontë.

The Complete Poems of Emily Brontë, edited by C. W.
Hatfield.

ANNE BRONTË :

Contributions to **Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell**,
1846.

Agnes Grey, 1847.

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, 1848.

PATRICK BRANWELL BRONTË :

Translations of the Odes of Horace (three books), privately
printed by John Drinkwater, 1910.

Some of Branwell's poems were printed posthumously by
F. A. Leyland.

The Oxford University Press has published **The Spell**,
a short tale by Charlotte Brontë, taken from a
volume of manuscripts discovered in a second-hand
bookshop in Brussels in 1892.

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